

Appendix four



Listening Learning Leading

South Oxfordshire District Council petition scheme

We welcome petitions from people who live, work or study in the district. We recognise petitions as one of a number of ways people can let us know their concerns.

If you like, you can set up a petition on our website - it's quick and easy to do, and people can sign it online - you can then submit the petition directly to us when it's ready.

You can send paper petitions to:

Democratic Services
South Oxfordshire District Council
135 Eastern Avenue
Milton Park
Milton
OX14 4SB

Guidelines for submitting a petition

Make sure your petition includes:

- a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition - it should state what action you want the council to take
- the name and address and signature of everybody supporting the petition.

You should provide your contact details and an address, or those of another organiser, along with your petition. We'll use these details to contact you to explain how we will respond to the petition.

If you use our online petition system, your name will appear on the website but we won't show any of your contact details. If you don't provide the name of any of the organisers, we will contact people who have signed the petition to agree who should act as the petition organiser.

In the period immediately before an election or referendum we may need to deal with your petition differently – if this is the case we will contact you to explain the reasons and discuss how the timescale of your petition may have to change.

If your petition doesn't follow the guidelines set out above, we may decide not to do follow it up. If that happens, we will contact you to explain why.

What types of petitions are excluded?

We will not take action on any petition which we consider to be vexatious or abusive and will explain the reasons for this in our acknowledgement of the petition.

If the petition applies to a planning or licensing application, or if it is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having a mayor) other procedures apply and we won't necessarily apply the procedures in this document. For example a petition on a planning application will be treated as a comment on that application through the standard planning application consultation process.

If we receive a petition on the same or similar topic as one we have received in the last six months, we will not treat it as a new petition. We will acknowledge receipt of the petition within 10 working days and include details of our response to the previous petition on the subject.

If we are currently considering a petition on the same or similar subject the petitions will be combined.

What will the council do when it receives a petition?

We will send you an acknowledgement within 10 working days of receiving the petition. We'll let you know what we plan to do with the petition and when you can expect to hear from us again. We may decide to verify the authenticity of the petition and checking the details of the people who have signed it. We will publish the petition on our website.

If we can do what your petition asks for, the acknowledgement may confirm that we have taken the action requested and the petition will be closed. If the petition has 500 signatures it will trigger a council debate so we will tell you when and where the meeting will take place. If the petition needs more investigation, we will tell you the steps we plan to take.

To ensure that people know what we are doing in response to the petitions we receive, we will publish the details of all petitions submitted to us on our website, except in cases where this would be inappropriate. Whenever possible we will also publish all correspondence relating to the petition - all personal details will be removed. When anybody signs an e-petition, we will email them our response to the petition. We will not send anybody anything, that isn't relevant to the e-petition they have signed, unless they agree to receive other emails.

We will inform the local district councillors of all petitions we've received relating to their area.

How will the council respond to petitions?

Our response to a petition will depend on what a petition asks for and how many people have signed it, but may include one or more of the following:

- taking the action requested in the petition
- considering the petition at a council meeting
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by Cabinet or the appropriate committee
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition

We will always keep the local district councillor(s) informed.

In addition to these steps, we will consider all the specific actions we can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition.

Relevant steps

If your petition is about something over which we have no direct control (for example the local railway or hospital) we will consider making representations on behalf of the community to the relevant body. We work with a large number of local partners and where possible we'll work with them to respond to your petition. If we are not able to do this for any reason (for example if what the petition calls for conflicts with council policy), then we will explain the reasons for this to you. You can find more information on the services we are responsible for at www.southoxon.gov.uk

If your petition is about something that a different council is responsible for we will give consideration to what the best method is for responding to it. This might consist of simply forwarding the petition to the other council, but could involve other steps. In any event, we will always notify you of the action we have taken, and in the case of e-petitions, each petitioner will be advised by email.

Full council debates

If your petition contains more than 500 signatures it will automatically be referred to full Council for debate. We will endeavour to consider the petition at the next meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible so it will be considered at the following meeting.

You will be given three minutes to present the petition at the meeting and it will then be discussed by councillors.

The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. The council may decide to take the action the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or refer the matter to Cabinet or the relevant committee and decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision.

We will send you written confirmation of this decision.